

There are 2 main features to notice in this chapter. The 1st thing is the way in which these judgments echo the judgments which came upon Egypt & the wicked Pharaoh, & the other is the great intensity of these judgments which far surpasses anything we have seen in Revelation so far. It is important to recall that each of the cycles of judgment (the seal, the trumpets and the bowls), begins from the vantage point of the heavenly throne. In doing this, the point is made repeatedly that God's will has always been done & is now being done in heaven. But as a result of these judgments, God's will one day will be done upon the earth. But there is something very frightening about this cycle, for once the bowls of judgment have been poured out upon the earth, God's wrath will be complete, it will extend to all the earth & all of its inhabitants. This, of course, means that the return of JX is the day of final judgment.

The series of the bowl judgments begins when John says *"then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the 7 angels, 'Go & pour out on the earth the 7 bowls of the wrath of God.'"* The loud voice comes from the temple, indicating that everything which is about to happen will take place according to God's plans & instructions. This is moment that the martyrs in heaven have been waiting for. They cried out "how long O Lord before our blood is avenged." The time has come for God to pour out His wrath upon all those who reject the gospel of JX, who persecute His church, & who worship idols. As God brought the Pharaoh to his knees so that Israel could begin the journey to the promised land, so now God will bring the world to its end, establish the new heavens & new earth so that His people will enter the heavenly city & receive their promised inheritance. Notice that throughout this series of judgments, God's wrath is now focused directly upon those

who have worshiped the beast. V 2: *"The first angel went & poured out his bowl on the earth, & harmful & painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast & worshiped its image."* When the 1st trumpet judgment sounds, God's wrath is poured out upon the earth itself, the trees & the grass. But this time, judgment falls directly upon the earth's unbelieving inhabitants. Like the painful boils & sores of the 6th plague which came upon Egypt (Ex 9:8-12), so too, this particular judgment uses apocalyptic imagery to make an important redemptive-historical point. God seals those who are His & protects them from His wrath. But those who have taken the Mark of the Beast will find their master is powerless to protect them from the plague sent by God. Just as the magicians of Egypt could not protect the Pharaoh nor his people, so now the mark of the beast not only fails to protect those who serve the dragon, it actually identifies them as objects of God's wrath. & all those bearing the number of man-666-will suffer beyond measure. Likewise, the 2nd bowl includes a number of powerful biblical images. Echoing the 1st plague upon Egypt, when the water of the great Nile turned into blood, we read in Rev 8:8-9, *"The 2nd angel sounded his trumpet, & something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, & a third of the ships were destroyed."* In v 3 of Rev 16, we read of the 2nd bowl judgment, *"The 2nd angel poured out his bowl into the sea, & became like the blood of a corpse, & and every living thing died that was in the sea."* Whereas in the 2nd trumpet of Rev 8, a third of the sea had been turned to blood, now God strikes dead every living creature in the oceans. Nothing survives.

The domain of the dragon is smitten at the time of judgment. According to Rev 21:1, in the new heaven & new earth, there is no more sea, that place of storm & tempest which is the symbolic realm of the dragon.

According to v 4, *"The 3rd angel poured out his bowl into the rivers & the springs of water, & they became blood."* God had turned all of Egypt's water to blood. In the 3rd trumpet judgment, God makes one third of the waters of the earth bitter, bringing sickness or death upon those who drink it. Now God fouls all the waters of the earth, symbolic of the fact that God's judgment now extends even to the sources of life. But what is perhaps most interesting about this judgment is the response it elicits from the angel who carries it out. V 5 *"& I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: 'Just are You O Holy One, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints & prophets, & You have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve.'"* There are loud echoes here from Deut 32:4, when, just before entering Moab prior to Israel's conquest of Canaan, Moses proclaims this about YHWH: *"He is the Rock, His works are perfect, & all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright & just is He."* God's judgments are altogether righteous. For those who have shed the blood of the saints, will now be forced to drink their own blood—an apocalyptic symbol of how God's just punishment perfectly fits the crime. (Isis & Alqaida)

Upon witnessing the righteous nature of this judgment, we read about the response from the martyrs in heaven in v 7, *"& I heard the altar saying: 'Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true & just are Your judgments.'"* God will avenge his suffering servants, & heaven resounds w/ praise to God, when the day of final retribution comes. This is news of great comfort to a suffering & persecuted church. According to Rev 8:12, when the 4th trumpet sounds, the light of the sun, the moon & the stars will be diminished by a third. But the 4th bowl judgment results not in diminished light, but in a massive intensification of the sun's heat. According to v 8, *"the 4th angel poured out his bowl on the sun, & it was allowed to scorch people w/*

fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat & they cursed the name of God, who had power over these plagues. They did not repent & give Him glory."

Lest we forget the significance of this particular judgment, we need to recall to mind the words of Rev 7:16, describing an earlier vision of the saints in heaven: *"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat."* The point is that God's people are protected from His wrath, while those who serve the dragon curse God, refuse to repent or give God glory, despite the ferocity of His judgment. So deep are the effects of sin upon the human heart, so thoroughly have the beast and the false prophets deceived the world's inhabitants that they curse their creator even while his judgment is being poured out upon them.

The 5th bowl judgment also echoes the 9th plague upon Egypt, which is darkness. We read in v 10: *"The 5th angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, & its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish & cursed the God of heaven for their pains & sores. They did not repent of their deeds."* Earlier in Rev 2, we read about Satan's throne being in Pergamum, a symbolic reference to the prevalence of pagan temples & false religion centered in the area. One of the saints there, a man by the name of Antipas, had already laid down his life in martyrdom. But after taking the life of one of the saints, Satan's kingdom cannot stop darkness from coming upon the whole earth. The great irony is that the throne of Satan—symbolic of the kingdom of darkness—will now itself be shrouded in darkness. Like the 4th trumpet judgment, this 5th bowl judgment is based on Ex 10:22 where God brings total darkness over Egypt. This 9th plague was mocking the Egyptian sun god, Ra. & Pharaoh was believed to be an incarnation of Ra. In causing darkness to fall over the Egyptians but not the

Hebrews, God was showing that He was in control of the sun, not Ra & not Pharaoh.

We will summarize all this w/ 3 statements.

1st These judgments are the expressions of the will of God. Beloved, our God is not a cosmic Santa Claus. God does not turn a blind eye & a deaf ear to sin. No, this is the awesome God who created everything in the universe. This is the living Lord of this world, the God who will one day settle every score. The God who will respond in justice to every evil, every wrong, every wickedness. In v 1 it is God's voice that commands the angels to go & pour out the 7 bowls of His wrath. Notice that the angel of the waters worships Him in v 5 by saying "You brought these judgments." In v 6 "You have given them blood to drink." In v 7 the altar responds: "True & just are Your judgments." God is doing this. In v 8 it is God who allows the sun to scorch the earth- the sun does not operate according to its own laws. It is an instrument manipulated by God, its creator. God is sovereign over the sun. & in v 9 we read that God has Authority over all these plagues. Unbelievers will know that it is God sending these calamities & yet, despite the agony which comes upon them they will continue to curse God & refuse to repent. On the Last Day of Judgment everyone will know that these judgments are expressions of the will of Almighty God.

2nd These judgments are manifestations of the character of God. This is the God of the Bible, this is the God who has revealed Himself in JX. Notice what the angel says in v 5: "Just are You, O Holy One, who is & who was, for You brought these judgments." Notice the important word "for." It means these acts of judgment serve to reveal what God is like. He is just, He is holy, He is sovereign. How do we know this? "For" or because You brought these judgments & as Abraham said, "the God of all the earth must do right." This reveals that God is just &

is committed to what is right. This reveals that God lives up to His name, the Holy One, implying God's passionate hatred of & judicial attack upon sin & evil. & this also reveals God's absolute sovereignty. In other words, God judges because He has the right to judge. & how does He have that right? Throughout the Bk of Rev God is referred to as the One who was & is & is to come. He is the God of 3 tenses. But here in chap 16:5 there are only 2 tenses: "O Holy One who is & who was." Why is the phrase: "is to come" left out? Because right here, God has come. The One who has the right to judge has arrived.

Notice again the agreement from the altar from the martyrs: "Yes, Lord God the Almighty" – stressing the unmatched power of God. The dragon, the beast & the false prophet & all who follow them in this evil world system cannot withstand His judgments when He determines to enact them. "True & just are Your judgments." These judgments are manifestations of the character of God, displaying His glory: which is just, sovereign, holy, almighty & true.

3rd These judgments of God are the consequence of settled human sinfulness. This is not a short tempered God, not a capricious god w/ a tender ego whose anger flies into a rage at the slightest provocation. These judgments are the righteous response to a determined sinfulness. These are not good people. They are not worshippers of God- they have the mark of the beast & worship his image. They are people who have settled into a commitment to idolatry. Look at v 6 "they have shed the blood of saints & prophets." They hate Xans & they display it. V 9 "they cursed the name of God." V 11 "they cursed the God of Heaven." V 21 "They cursed God."

& all the politically correct secular humanists in spite of all their professions of openness & tolerance, they are not neutral people. At the end of the day, they blaspheme God. & this tells us something else. 3 times here, John

tells us that these people blaspheme God. What is the point? These are evil people who have totally taken on the character of the false god that they serve. In fact, more telling than anything else is that in spite of their experience of these judgments that they know to be from God, v 9 says they did not repent of what they had done. & of course it is not that they want to repent. They are obstinate in their refusal to repent. There will never be anyone who says, "I wish I could repent, but God will not let me." The judgments of God are the consequences of settled human sinfulness, which is why the angel at the end of v 6 says God's judgment "is what they deserve."

But listen to me Beloved: God's judgment & wrath is what I deserve & what you deserve. It is only by the sheer mercy & grace of God & the shed blood of Jesus for us that we do not get what we deserve. When God poured out His plagues of judgment that devastated the unrepentant Egyptians, where were His people? His undeserving people? Protected by God in the land of Goshen. & when the final plague struck- the slaughter of the firstborn- where were God's people- His undeserving people? Safely hidden away behind the applied blood of the Passover lamb.

Beloved, we have no need to fear the judgment & wrath of God- not because we deserve something better, but because we have hidden ourselves behind the blood of the greater Passover Lamb, JX, & when we stand before the Eternal Judge on the Last Day we will be clothed in the R+ of JX. When the gap between promise & reality is closed, the ungodly will meet with retribution & we who are God's people will meet with redemption.

The perfect will of God will be done – & our prayer will be answered: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In the final verse of Charles Wesley's hymn "& can it be that I should Gain?" he wrote:

"No condemnation now I dread. Jesus & all in Him is mine.

Alive in Him, my living Head & clothed in R+ divine.
Bold I approach the eternal Throne,
& claim the crown through X my own." Amen & Amen.